

THE GOSPEL OF ABRAHAM'S SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

NO. 869

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SUNDAY EVENING MAY 2, 1869,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all."
Romans 8:32.*

WE have selected this verse as our theme, but our true text you will find in the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, the narrative which we read to you this morning at full length, and upon which we spoke in detail in our discourse. I thought it meet to keep to one point this morning, on the ground that one thing at a time is best, and therefore I endeavored to lead your undivided contemplations to the peerless example of holy, believing obedience, which the father of the faithful presented to us when he offered up his son.

But it would be a very unfair way of handling Holy Scripture to leave such a subject as this, so full of Christ, without dwelling upon the typical character of the whole narrative. If the Messiah is anywhere symbolized in the Old Testament, He is certainly to be seen upon Mount Moriah, where the beloved Isaac, willingly bound and laid upon the altar, is a lively foreshadowing of the Well-beloved of heaven yielding His life as a ransom.

We doubt not that one great intent of the whole transaction was to afford Abraham a clearer view of Christ's day. The trial was covertly a great privilege, unveiling as it did to the Patriarch the heart of the Great Father in His great deed of love to men, and displaying at the same time the willing obedience of the Son, who cheerfully became a burnt offering unto God. The Gospel of Moriah, which is but another name for Calvary, was far clearer than the revelation made at the gate of paradise, or to Noah in the ark, or to Abraham himself on any former occasion. Let us pray for a share in the privilege of the renowned friend of God, as we study redemption in the light which made Abraham glad.

Without detaining you with any lengthened preface, for which we have neither time nor inclination, we shall first, *draw the parallel between the offering of Christ and the offering of Isaac*. And secondly, we shall show *wherein the sacrifice of Christ goes far beyond even this most edifying type*. O blessed Spirit of God, take of the things of Christ at this hour, and show them unto us.

I. First, THE PARALLEL.

You know the story before you. We need not repeat it, except as we weave it into our meditation. As Abraham offered up Isaac, so it might be said of him that he "spared not his own son," so the ever blessed God offered up His Son Jesus Christ and spared Him not.

There is a likeness in the person offered. Isaac was Abraham's son, and in that emphatic sense, his only son. Hence the anguish of resigning him to sacrifice. There is a depth of meaning in that word "only" when it is applied to a child. Dear as life to a parent's heart is his only child. No gold of Ophir nor sparkling gems of India can be compared therewith. Those of you blessed with the full quiver, having many children, would yet find it extremely difficult if one had to be taken from you, to say which it should be. A thousand pangs would rend your hearts in making a choice of one out of the seven or the ten, upon whose clay-cold brow you must imprint a last fond kiss.

But what would be your grief if you had but one! What agony to have torn from you the only token of your mutual love, the only representative of your race! Cruel is the wind which uproots the only heir of the ancient tree. Rude is the hand which dashes the only blossom from the rose. Ruthless spoiler, to deprive you of your sole heir, the cornerstone of your love, the polished pillar of your hope. Judge you

then the sadness which pierced the heart of Abraham when God bade him take his son, his only son, and offer him as a burnt offering!

But I have no language with which to speak of the heart of God when He gave up His only begotten Son. Instead of attempting the impossible, I must content myself with repeating the words of Holy Writ, "God *so* loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Nothing but infinite love to man could have led the God of love to bruise His Son and put Him to grief.

Christ Jesus, the Son of God, is, in His divine nature, one with God, co-equal and co-eternal with Him, His only begotten Son in a manner mysterious and unknown to us. As the divine Son the Father gave Him to us, "Unto us a Son is given, and his name shall be called the Mighty God." Our Lord, as man, is the Son of the Highest, according to the angel's salutation of the Virgin, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God."

In His human nature Jesus was not spared, but was made to suffer, bleed, and die for us. God and man in one person, two natures being wondrously combined, He was not spared, but delivered up for all His chosen. Herein is love! Behold it and admire! Consider it and wonder! The beloved Son is made a sacrifice! He, the Only-Begotten, is smitten of God and afflicted, and cries, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Remember that in Abraham's case *Isaac was the child of his heart*. I need not enlarge on that. You can readily imagine how Abraham loved him, but in the case of our Lord what mind can conceive how near and dear our Redeemer was to the Father? Remember those marvelous words of the Incarnate Wisdom, "I was by him as one brought up with him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before him." Our glorious Savior was more the Son of God's love than Isaac could be the darling of Abraham.

Eternity and infinity entered into the love which existed between the Father and the Son. Christ in human nature was matchlessly pure and holy, and in Him dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Therefore was He highly delightful to the Father, and that delight was publicly attested in audible declarations, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Yet He spared Him not, but made Him to be the substitute for us sinners, made Him as a curse for us, and to be hanged on a tree. Have you a favorite child? Have you one who nestles in your bosom? Have you one dearer than all other? Then should you be called to part with him, you will be able to have fellowship with the Great Father in delivering up His Son.

Remember too, that *Isaac was a most lovely and obedient son*. We have proof of that in the fact that he was willing to be sacrificed, for being a vigorous young man, he might have resisted his aged father, but he willingly surrendered himself to be bound, and submitted to be laid on the altar. How few there are of such sons! Could Abraham give him up? Few did I say, of such sons? I cannot apply that term to Christ, the Son of God, for there was never another such as He.

If I speak of His humanity, who ever obeyed his father as Christ obeyed His God? "Though he were a Son yet learned obedience." It was His meat and His drink to do the will of Him that sent Him.

"Wist you not," said He, "that I must be about My Father's business?" And yet this obedient Son, this Son of sons, God spared not, but unsheathed His sword against Him, and gave Him up to the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and death itself. What mighty love must have led the Father to this! Impossible is it to measure it.

*"So strange, so boundless was the love
Which pitied dying men,
The Father sent His equal Son,
To give them life again."*

It must not be forgotten too, that *around Isaac there clustered mysterious prophecies*. Isaac was to be the promised seed through which Abraham should live down to posterity, and evermore be a blessing to all nations. But what prophecies gathered about the head of Christ! What glorious things were spoken of Him before His coming! He was the conquering seed destined to break the dragon's head. He was the messenger of the covenant, yea, the covenant itself. He was foretold as the Prince of Peace, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

In Him was more of God revealed than in all the works of creation and of providence. Yet this august person, this heir of all things, the Wonderful, the Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, must bow His head to the stroke of sacred vengeance, being given up as the scapegoat for all believers, the Lamb of our Passover, the victim for our sin.

Brethren, I have left the shallows, and am far out to sea tonight. I am swimming in a great deep. I find no bottom, and I see no shore. I sink in depths of wonder. My soul would rather meditate than attempt to utter herself by word of mouth. Indeed, the theme of God's unspeakable gift, if we would comprehend its breadth and length, is rather for the closet than for the pulpit. It is rather to be meditated upon when you muse alone at eventide than to be spoken of in the great assembly.

Though we speak with the tongues of men and of angels, we cannot attain to the height of this great argument. God gave such a one to us that the world could not find His fellow nor heaven reveal His equal. He gave to us a treasure so priceless that if heaven and earth were weighed like the merchants' golden wedge, they could not buy the like thereof. For us was given up the chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely.

For us the head of most fine gold was laid in the dust, and the raven locks bestained with gore. For us those eyes which are soft as the eyes of doves were red with weeping, and washed with tears instead of milk. For us the cheeks which were as a bed of spices were defiled with spittle, and the countenance like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars, marred more than the sons of men. And all this was by the Father's appointment and ordaining, according to the eternal purpose written in the volume of this Book.

The parallel is very clear in *the preface of the sacrifice*. Let us show you in a few words. Abraham had three days in which to think upon and consider the death of his son. Three days in which to look into that beloved face and to anticipate the hour in which it would wear the icy pallor of death. But the Eternal Father foreknew and foreordained the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, not three days, nor three years, nor three thousand years, but or ever the earth was Jesus was to His Father, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Long ere His birth at Bethlehem it was foretold, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." It was an eternal decree that from the travail of the Redeemer there should arise a seed that should serve Him, being purchased by His blood. What perseverance of unselfish love was here!

Brethren, suffer me to pause and worship, for I fail to preach. I am abashed in the presence of such wondrous love. I cannot understand You, O great God. I know You are not moved by passions, nor affected by grief as men are, and therefore I dare not say that You did sorrow over the death of Your Son. But oh! I know that You are not a God of stone, impassible, unmoved, You are God, and therefore we cannot conceive You, but yet You do compare Yourself to a father having compassion on a prodigal. Do we err then, if we think of You as yearning over Your Well-beloved when He was given up to the pangs of death? Forgive me if I transgress in so conceiving of Your heart of love, but surely it was a costly sacrifice which You did make, costly even to You! I will not speak of You in this matter, O my God, for I cannot, but I will reverently think of You, and wonder how You could have looked so steadily through the long ages, and resolved so unwaveringly upon the mighty sacrifice, the immeasurable generosity of resigning Your dear Son to be slaughtered for us.

Remember that *Abraham prepared with sacred forethought everything for the sacrifice*. As I showed you this morning, he became a Gibeonite for God, acting as a hewer of wood, while he prepared the fuel for his son's burning. He carried the fire, and built the altar, providing everything needful for the painful

service. But what shall I say of the great God who, through the ages, was constantly preparing this world for the grandest event in its history—the death of the Incarnate God? All history converged to this point.

I venture to say it, that every transaction, whether great or small, that ever disturbed Assyria, or aroused Chaldea, or troubled Egypt, or chastened Jewry, had for its ultimate object the preparing of the world for the birth and the sacrifice of Christ. The cross is the center of all history. To it, from ancient ages, everything is pointing. Forward from it everything in this age proceeds, and backward to it everything may be traced. How deep is this subject, yet how true! God was always preparing for the giving up of the Well-beloved for the salvation of the sons of men!

We will not tarry, however, on the preface of the sacrifice, but advance in lowly worship to behold *the act itself*. When Abraham came at last to Mount Moriah, *he bade his servants remain at the foot of the hill*. Now gather up your thoughts, and come with me to Calvary, to the true Moriah. At the foot of that hill God bade all men stop. The twelve have been with Christ in His life-journey, but they must not be with Him in his death throes. Eleven go with him to Gethsemane, but only three may draw near to Him in His passion. But when it comes to the climax of all, they forsake Him and flee. He fights the battle singly. “I have trodden the winepress alone,” said He, “and of the people there was none with me.”

Although around Calvary there gathered a great crowd to behold the Redeemer die, yet spiritually Jesus was there alone with the avenging God. The wonderful transaction of Calvary as to its real essence and spirit was performed in solemn secrecy between the Father and the Son. Abraham and Isaac were alone. The Father and the Son were equally alone when His soul was made a sacrifice for sin.

Did you observe also that *Isaac carried the wood!*—a true picture of Jesus carrying His cross. It was not every malefactor who had to bear the tree which was afterwards to bear him, but in our Lord's case, and by an excess of cruelty, wicked men made Him carry His cross. With a felicity of exactness to the prophetic type, God had so ordered it, that as Isaac bore the wood up to the altar, so Christ should carry His cross up to the place of doom.

A point worthy of notice is that it is said, as you will find if you read the chapter of Abraham and Isaac, “that they went both of them together.” He who was to smite with the knife, and the other who was to be the victim, walked in peaceful converse to the altar. “They went both together,” agreeing in heart. It is to me delightful to reflect that Christ Jesus and His Father went both together in the work of redeeming love. In that great work by which we are saved, the Father gave us Christ, but Christ equally gave us Himself. The Father went forth to vengeance dressed in robes of love to man, and the Son went forth to be the victim of that vengeance with the same love in His heart.

They proceeded together, and at last *Isaac was bound*, bound by his father. So Christ was bound, and He says, “You could have no power against me unless it were given to you of my Father.” Christ could not have been bound by Judas, nor Pilate, nor Herod if the Eternal Father had not virtually bound Him and delivered Him into the hands of the executioner.

My soul, stand and wonder! The Father binds His Son—’tis God your Father who binds your Elder Brother, and gives Him up to cruel men that He may be reviled, spit upon, and nailed to the tree to die.

The parallel goes still further, for while the father binds the victim, *the victim is willing to be bound*. As we have already said, Isaac might have resisted, but he did not. There are no traces of struggling, no signs of so much as a murmur. Even so with Jesus. He went cheerfully up to the slaughter-place, willing to give Himself for us. Said He, “No man takes my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.”

You see how the parallel holds, and as you behold the earthly parent, with anguish in his face, about to drive the knife into the heart of his dear child, you have before you, as nearly as earthly pictures can paint heavenly things, the mirror of the divine Father about to give up the Well-beloved, the just, for the unjust, that He may bring us to God. I pause there. What further can I say? It is not, as I have said before, a theme for words, but for the heart's emotions, for the kisses of your lips, and the tears of your soul.

Yet the parallel runs a little further. After having been suspended for a moment, *Isaac was restored again*. He was bound and laid upon the altar, the knife was drawn, and he was in spirit given up to death, but he was delivered. Leaving that gap, wherein Christ is not typified fully by Isaac, but by the ram, yet was Jesus also delivered. He came again, the living and triumphant Son, after He had been dead. Isaac was for three days looked upon by Abraham as dead. On the third day the father rejoiced to descend the mountain with his son. Jesus was dead, but on the third day He rose again.

Oh! the joy on that mountain summit, the joy of the two as they returned to the waiting servants, both delivered out of a great trial. But ah! I cannot tell you what joy there was in the heart of Jesus and the great Father when the tremendous sacrifice was finished, and Jesus had risen from the dead. But brethren, we shall know some day, for we shall enter into the joy of our Lord.

It is a bold thing to speak of God as moved by joy or affected by grief, but still, since He is no God of wood and stone, no insensible block, we may, speaking after the manner of men, declare that God rejoiced over His risen Son with exceeding joy, while the Son rejoiced also because His great work was accomplished. Remembering that passage in the prophet, where God speaks of His saints, and declares that He will rejoice over them with singing, what if I say that much more He did this with His SON, and resting in His love, He rejoiced over the risen one, even with joy and singing.

What followed the deliverance of Isaac? You heard, this morning, that from that moment *the covenant was ratified*. just at the base of that altar the angel declared the oath wherein God swore by Himself. Brethren, the risen Savior, once slain, has confirmed the covenant of grace, which now stands forever fast upon the two immutable things wherein it is impossible for God to lie.

Isaac, also, had *that day been the means of showing to Abraham the great provision of God*. That name, JEHOVAH-Jireh, was new to the world. It was given forth to men that day from Mount Moriah, and in the death of Christ men see what they never could have seen—and in His resurrection they behold the deepest of mysteries solved. God has provided what men wanted. The problem was, How can sinners be forgiven? How can the mischief of sin be taken away? How can sinners become saints, and those who were only fit to burn in hell be made to sing in heaven? The answer is yonder, where God gives up His Only-begotten to bleed and die instead of sinners, and then bids that Only-begotten return in glory from the grave. “JEHOVAH-Jireh,” is to be read by the light which streams from the cross. “The Lord will provide” is beheld on the Mount of Calvary as nowhere else in heaven or earth.

Thus have I tried to show the parallel, but I am sadly conscious of my want of power. I feel as if I were only giving you mere sketches, such as schoolboys draw with chalk or charcoal. You must fill them in. There is abundance of room—Abraham and Isaac, the Father and Christ. In proportion to the tenderness, and love with which you can enter into the human wonder, so, I think, by the loving and affectionate teaching of the Holy Spirit, you may enter into the transcendent wonder of the divine sacrifice for men.

II. But now, in the second place, I have to HINT AT SOME POINTS IN WHICH THE PARALLEL FALLS SHORT.

The first is this, that *Isaac would have died in the course of nature*. When offered up by his father, it was only a little in anticipation of the death which eventually must have occurred. But Jesus is He “who only has immortality,” and who never needed to die. Neither as God nor man had He anything about Him that rendered Him subject to the bands of death. To Him Hades was a place He need never enter, and the sepulcher, and the grave, were locked and barred fast to Him, for there were no seeds of corruption within His sacred frame. Without the taint of original sin, there was no need that His body should yield to the mortal stroke. Indeed, though He died, yet His body did not see corruption. God had shielded Him from that. So Isaac must die, but Jesus need not. His death was purely voluntary, and herein stands by itself, not to be numbered with the deaths of other men.

Moreover, *there was a constraint upon Abraham to give Isaac*. I admit the cheerfulness of the gift, but still the highest law to which his spiritual nature was subject rendered it incumbent upon believing Abraham to do as God commanded. But no stress could be laid upon the Most High. If He delivered up

His Son, it must be with the greatest freeness. Who could deserve that Christ should die for Him? Had we been perfection itself, and like the sinless angels, we could not have deserved such a gift as this. But my brethren and sisters, we were full of evil. We hated God. We continued to transgress against Him, and yet out of pure love to us He performed this miracle of grace—He gave His Son to die for us. Oh! unconstrained love—a fountain welling up from the depth of the divine nature, unasked for and undeserved! What shall I say of it? O God, be You ever blessed! Even the songs of heaven cannot express the obligations of our guilty race to Your free love in the gift of Your Son.

Furthermore, remember that *Isaac did not die after all, but Jesus did*. The pictures were as nearly exact as might be, for the ram was caught in the thicket, and the animal was slaughtered instead of the man. In our Lord's case He was the substitute for us, but there was no substitute for Him. He took our sins and bare them in His own body upon the tree. He was personally the sufferer. Not by proxy did He redeem us, but He Himself suffered for us. In *propria persona* He yielded up His life for us.

And here comes in one other point of difference, namely that *Isaac, if he had died, could not have died for us*. He might have died for us as an example of how we should resign life, but that would have been a small boon. It would have been no greater blessing than the Unitarian Gospel offers when it sets forth Christ as dying as our exemption.

Oh, but beloved, the death of Christ stands altogether alone and apart, because it is a death altogether for others, and endured solely and only from unselfish affection to the fallen. There is not a pang that rends the Savior's heart that needed to have been there if not for love to us. There is not a drop of blood that trickled from that thorn-crowned head or from those pierced hands that needed to be spilled if it were not for affection to such undeserving ones as we.

And look at what He has done for us! He has procured our pardon. We who have believed in Him are forgiven. He has procured our adoption. We are sons of God in Christ Jesus. He has shut the gates of hell for us. We cannot perish, nor can any pluck us out of His hands. He has opened the gates of heaven for us. We shall be with Him where He is. Our very bodies shall feel the power of His death, for they shall rise again at the sound of the trumpet at the last day. He was delivered for us, His people, "for us all." He endured all for all His people—for all who trust Him, for every son of Adam who casts himself upon Him. For every son and daughter of man that will rely alone upon Him for salvation, He was a sacrifice.

Was He delivered for you, dear hearer? Have you a part in His death? If so, shall I need to press upon you as you come to this table to think of the Father's gift, and of the Father Himself? Do I need to urge you with tearful eyes, and melting heart as you receive the emblems of our Redeemer's passion, to look to His Father and to Him, and with humble adoration to admire that love which I have failed to depict, and which you will fail to measure?

I never felt, I think, in all my life more utterly ashamed of words, and more ready to abandon speech, for the thoughts of God's love are too heavy for the shoulders of my words. They burden all my sentences, and crush them down, even thought itself cannot bear the stupendous load. Here is a deep, a great deep, and our barque knows not how to sail thereon. Here deep calls unto deep, and our mind is swallowed up in the vastness and immensity of the billows of love that roll around us. But what reason cannot measure, faith can grasp, and what our understanding cannot comprehend, our hearts can love, and what we cannot tell to others, we will whisper out in the silence of our spirits to ourselves, until our souls bow with lowest reverence before the God whose name is Love.

As I close, I feel bound to say that there may be some here to whom this is but an idle tale. Ah! my heart breaks as I think of you, that you should continue to sin against your Maker, and forget Him from day to day as most of you do. Your Maker gives His own Son to redeem His enemies, and He comes to you tonight and tells you that if you will repent of your sins, and trust yourselves in the hands of His dear Son, who died for sinners, you shall be saved. But alas! you will not do so, so evil is your heart that you turn against your God, and you turn against His mercy.

Oh! do you say, "I will not turn against Him any more"? Are your relentings kindled? Do you desire to be reconciled to the God you have offended? You may be reconciled. You shall be reconciled tonight, if you do now but give yourselves up to God your Father, and to Christ your Savior. Whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life, for this is His Gospel, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned." What that damnation is may you never know, but may His grace be yours. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—HEBREWS 6.

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